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ABSTRACT

The act of reading directions and being able to carry out those directions precisely is very different from reading prose--such a specific skill needs to be taught to adult students. Being able to follow directions is an important workplace competency, as well as being crucial for completing tests required of job applicants. Mountains of forms, in daily life as well as on the job, require the reading and understanding of directions. One activity to see if adult students can do what written directions ask is to use the chalkboard to write simple directions using only familiar vocabulary. As in any other reading instruction, the teacher needs to begin teaching this skill at the level of vocabulary and understanding of the students. (Contains 8 references and 7 sample activities that can be adapted for use in most any classroom.) (RS)

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DIRECTION READING : AN ESSENTIAL SKILL FOR ADULT LEARNERS

Carolyn Zilch

ED 398 534

This author has observed adult students that have attended ABE classes for five or more years and still have very limited skills. The majority of reading instruction provided is too often limited to story reading. While this may improve some skills, perhaps reading lessons should be aimed at more useful goals. Since adult education is in a state of flux from government policies and resultant funding, it would be more expedient to provide proof that adult students acquire practical employable skills from these programs. The act of reading directions and being able to carry out these directions precisely is very different from reading prose.

Inquiry: Is reading and understanding directions a specific skill that needs to be taught to adult students?

Several years ago I attended a provocative county-wide In-service seminar at the Lakeview, Michigan High School by Willard Daggett. Early in the presentation to several hundred practicing teachers and administrators, it was asked, "How many of you can program your VCR?" Less than 10% of the audience raised their hands. The rest of Mr. Daggett's presentation convinced me that reading directions is really a specific kind of reading skill.

Adult students have many needs which instructors try to meet. Perhaps one of the most important is learning to read directions. We may not realize how often this skill is needed in our everyday lives and may be essential as an employability skill. Every time a can of soup is opened, we need to read if it is to be diluted or not, if we want a satisfactory meal. Does a frozen food need to be cooked in an oven or microwave, at what temperature, and for how long? Many things purchased for home use come with a guarantee. This is only useful if you can read how to fill out and mail the registration, and know under what terms the item will be repaired or replaced. Then there are those wonderful instruction manuals! Most people that buy a computer have a real problem understanding the manual that comes with it.

In the September 20, 1993 issue of *Newsweek*, article *Dumber Than We Thought* Kaplan, Wingert and Chideya state: "Sure, Johnny can read simple prose. And Mary can add a couple of integers all right. The problem is their inability to make practical use of those skills in everyday life. Nearly half of the nation's 191 million adults, cannot do such tasks as fill out a bank-deposit slip, compute the cost of carpeting a room or translate information from a table to a graph. And heaven help them if they need to find a Saturday departure on a bus schedule." So, if this is a problem with the average American, what does it mean to an adult with very limited reading abilities?

If reading directions is a practical problem in everyday life, it certainly is a greater hindrance as an employment skill where the environment may be strange. Equipment and

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vocabulary used on any job is likely to differ from home use. The confused new employee may not want to ask what to do, or how to do it, and thereby admit that written directions could not be read or understood. *The SCANS Report For America 2000*, lists Workplace Competencies that are needed for solid job performance. One competency considered essential is for effective workers to productively use: "Information - They can acquire and evaluate data, organize and maintain files, interpret and communicate, and use computers to process information."

In *Reading for Technical and Business Personnel*, from Mercer County Community College, the first section on Technical Reading includes; "Understand printed directions, and Interpreting printed directions," as main objectives. They address the fact that, " to understand that we read differently depending on the purpose of our reading." In their section on study strategies for the purpose of reading they state; "1. Leisure reading does not require this thoroughness, 2. Reading for classwork requires some. 3. Reading for tests or for material that is important for work would require a very thorough reading."

West Virginia State Dept. of Education has written, *A Quick Guide to Taking Employment Tests and Applying for Government and Other Jobs*. The abstract lists following directions as the first specific topic. Since most government jobs require the applicant to pass one or more tests, the first lesson is "Following Directions and Using Answer Keys." They add that a test supervisor may give some instructions, "but it will be your responsibility to read the specific instructions for each part. Sometimes it is up to you to read and understand all directions and follow them exactly. If you misunderstand what you are expected to do, you may answer incorrectly and have a lower score."

The above document also includes many helpful lessons on completing other paperwork found in the job testing situation such as: Personal information sheets, directions for math tests, what to do on the day of test taking and final reminders.

The Montcalm Adult Reading Council located in the Greenville, Mi. library has provided me with much helpful material in tutoring adult students. On the subject of direction reading, I have found practical lessons in: Essential Skills For The Workplace, Using Forms and Documents. This is indispensable information for anyone employed. Some items include: a. directions for filling out a W4 for state and federal income tax, b. using time sheets, filling out, reading and checking accuracy, c. endorsing, cashing, depositing a paycheck, d. personal forms like credit applications, terms, finance information, e. education and certification forms, f. on the job forms, catalog, invoices, orders, etc. They also included a section on following sequential instructions. The example given was for an on the job injury. First the medical care, followed by insurance forms, applying for disability, etc.

It seems like our lives, especially on the job, contain a mountain of forms, all of which require the reading and understanding of directions. Therefore, any teacher of adult

students need to be sure that this skill is not overlooked. I believe that the greatest risk in this undertaking is that it seems so obvious that teaching it may be ignored.

I taught kindergarten and first grade for twenty four years with the greatest academic emphasis on learning to read. When I first began to tutor adults I discovered that they lacked some of the very basic first grade reading skills that I had taught to children.

Children enjoy reading stories that increase in difficulty with their skill and vocabulary level. It is easy to check comprehension by the standard method of asking questions about the story content. However, I discovered that children often could not understand written directions in their workbooks, or other printed matter unless I read it for them and explained how to do what was asked.

I found that we could make a class game using the chalkboard with written directions, being careful to use only familiar vocabulary which was quite limited. I would point to the board, call a child's name and say, "do this." Examples: 1. Walk to the door, open it, close it, and go back to your chair. 2. Clap you hands over your head and walk around your table. 3. Take a pencil to Tom and tell us what color his shirt is. After following one of these directions, the child would then read it to the class to insure that all children understand the written words.

I believe that this activity could be used by ABE students with more adult actions described, but still written in a limited vocabulary. For example: 1. Find page 52 in your book and tell us the last word on the page, 2. Write your last name on the chalkboard and tell us your favorite television program. The main objective is always to see if students can physically do what the written direction asks.

As in any other reading instruction, the teacher needs to begin teaching this skill at the level of vocabulary and understanding of the student(s). At some point it is good to "model" this skill. Remind students that it is OK to reread a second or third time, especially if there is some new vocabulary. To model; 1. First read and check vocabulary, 2. Reread for content, 3. Think about (and discuss with group) what the direction is asking, 4. If necessary reread again, especially in technical directions.

The teacher should try at every practical opportunity to write directions instead of giving them orally for every day schedules, assignments, etc. For example; "For tomorrow's reading class read pages 42 - 44," OR "Put your papers away and get ready for lunch", OR "Remember to bring your book report tomorrow."

The following are some suggestions and examples which can be adapted for use in most any classroom. Some can be all directions with written answers that may look like a test, but the difference is that the answer only shows if the reader understands the question, the answer is not really important.

EXAMPLE 1

READ AND DO

1. Write your last name on this line. _____

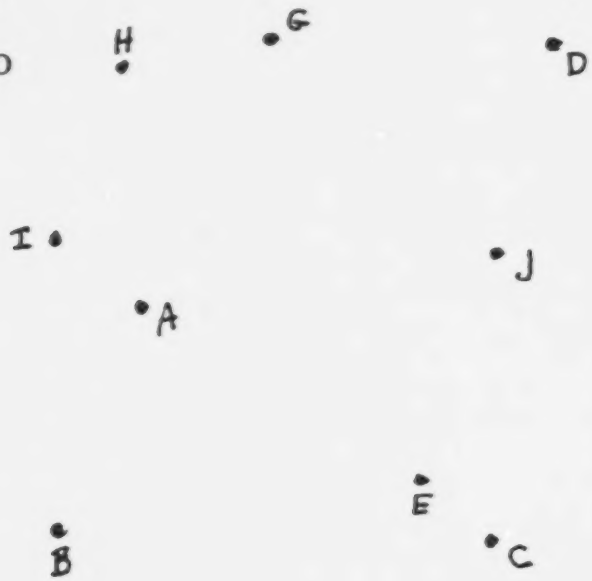
2. What is your favorite color? _____

3. Write the last 3 letters of the alphabet on this line. _____

4. What time will we eat lunch? _____

EXAMPLE 2

READ AND DO



1. Draw a straight line from I to J.

2. Make a line from B to C.

3. Draw a tall box on the last line.

4. Now a line from G to J.

5. Finish that part with one from I to G.

6. I to B for the next line.

7. Your last line will be the J to C line.

8. Are there some letters that you did not use? _____

EXAMPLE 3

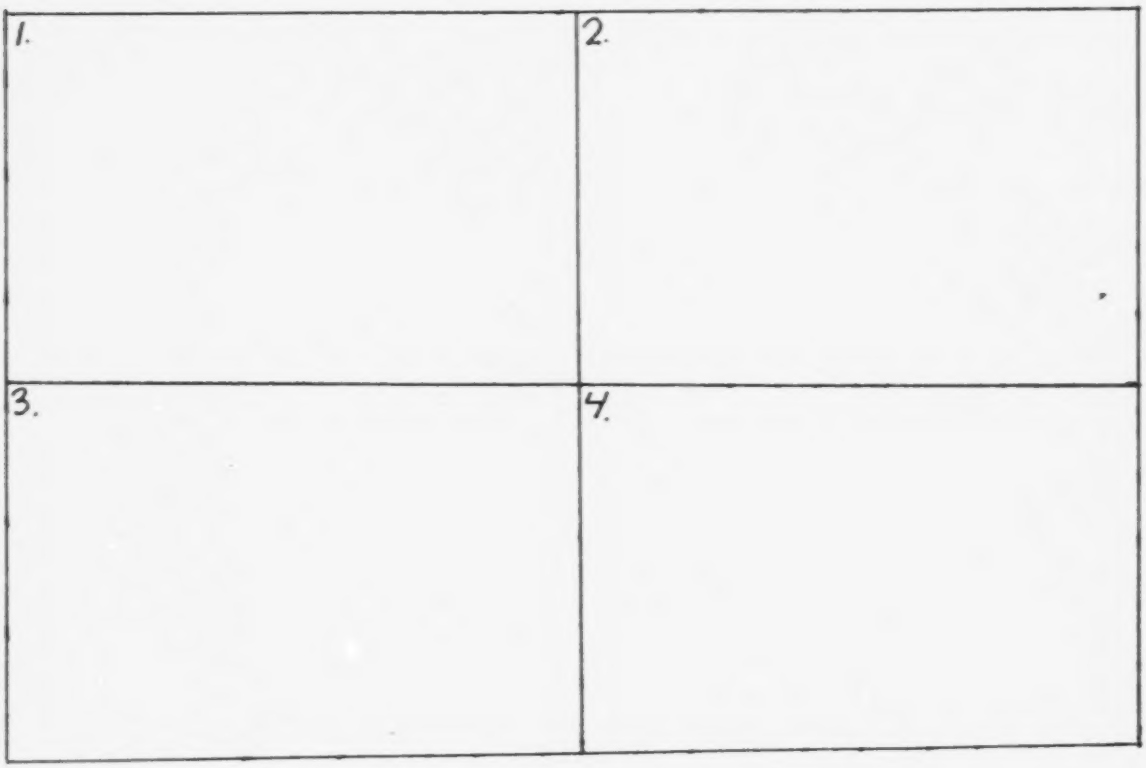
READ AND DO

1. Draw a tree in box two and put a bird on the tree.

2. Write your name in the third box and make a heart around the box.

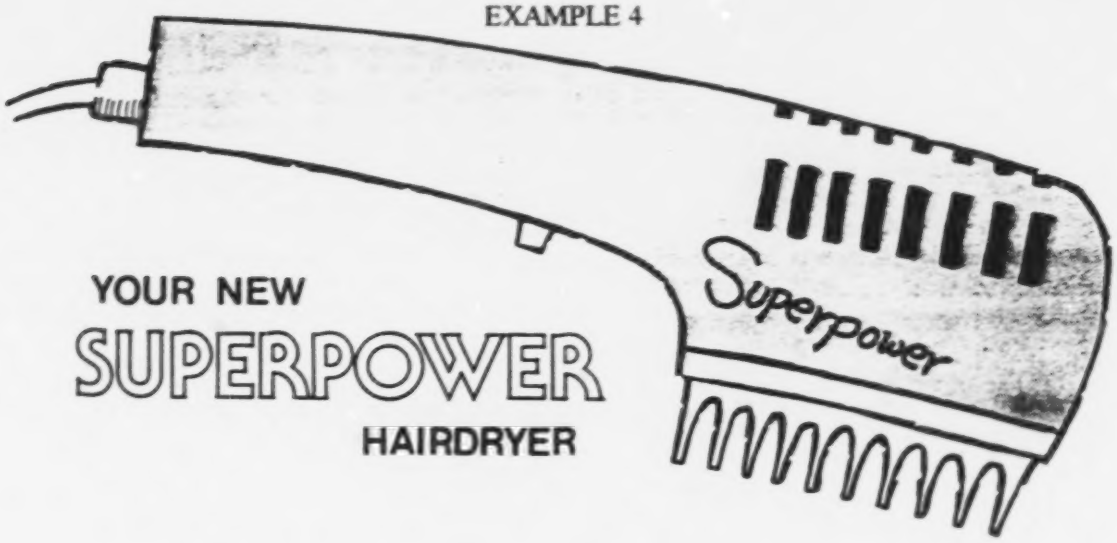
3. Make six flowers in the first box with a rabbit sitting next to them. Don't forget to make long ears on the bunny.

4. Draw a large circle in box four, then a little circle in the middle of the large one. Now make two triangles next to each other higher than the small circle, but still inside the large circle. Draw a lot of loops next to each other on top of the large circle. Does it look like hair on a face? This can be the face for a clown, you decide if he should have a smile or a frown and draw one.



Many good ideas are found in the book *Reading and Following Directions.* The following examples are taken from this book.

EXAMPLE 4



INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE AND CARE

- Never immerse SUPERPOWER in water. Never run attachments (uh TACH muhnts) under water while unit is plugged in. Do not use while bathing (BAY*TH* ing) or showering (SHOW uhr ing). *Any wet appliance can cause a fatal shock.*
- Turn SUPERPOWER to the *off* position whenever you put it down—even for a minute.
- Keep air vents clear while the unit is on. If vents are covered, the unit will overheat.
- Keep vents clean. Periodically (pir ee AHD ik lee) brush away hair, lint, and dirt that build up on vents.
- Should SUPERPOWER overheat, it will automatically stop.
  1. Turn the unit off.
  2. Then unplug it from electrical outlet.
  3. Wait a few minutes to let the unit cool.
  4. Then plug it into electrical outlet.
  5. Turn unit on.
- CAUTION. Do not let a child use SUPERPOWER without supervision.

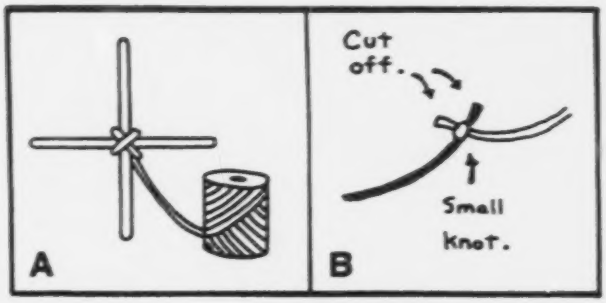
Instructions for Making a God's Eye

A god's eye is a brightly colored decoration from Mexico. It's supposed to bring good luck. These directions will help you make a small god's eye. It will be just the right size to hang on a Christmas tree or a car's mirror (MIR uhr).

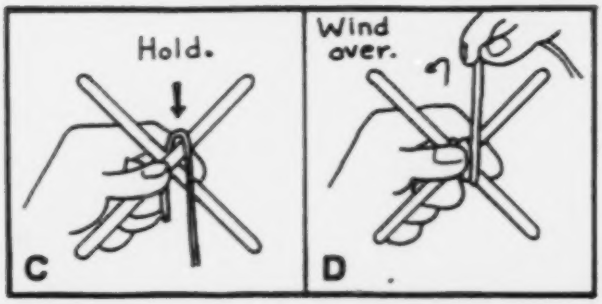
You will need two thin sticks about 3 inches long, yarn in a bright color, yarn in another color, and any kind of sticky tape.

First, make a cross with the two sticks. Attach (uh TACH) them together with the tape. (Look at the picture marked A.)

Cut off 3 feet of yarn in one color. Cut off 3 feet of yarn in the other color. Tie the two lengths of yarn together into one long length. Cut off the ends of the knot (NAHT). (Picture B).



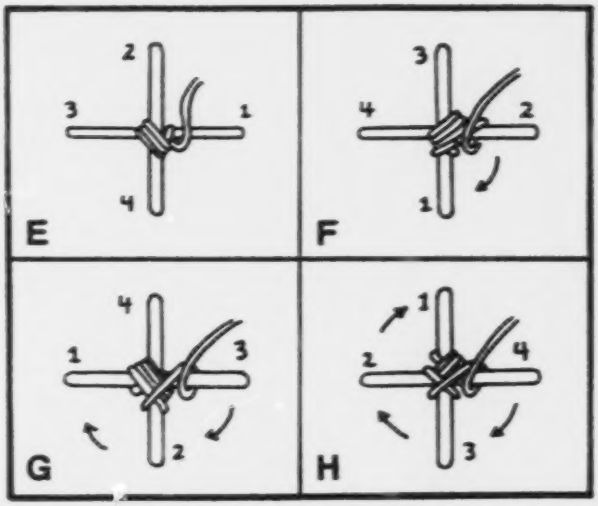
Now, start weaving (WEEV ing). Put one end of the yarn over the center of the cross. Hold the yarn down with your thumb. (Picture C). Wind the yarn tightly four times around the center of the cross. Make sure the strands of the yarn are side by side, not over each other. (Picture D).



Turn the cross so it stands upright. Pull the yarn tightly and wind it once around the first arm, the one that points right. (Picture E).

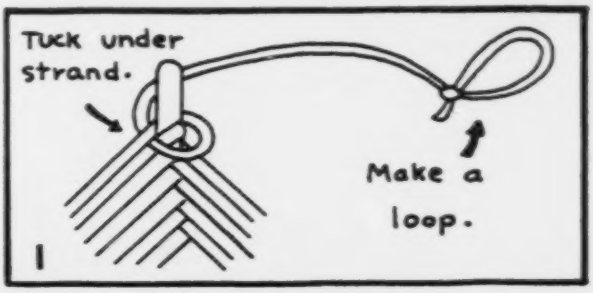
Now turn the cross so that the first arm points down. (Picture F). Pull tightly and wind the yarn once around the second arm. Turn the cross so the second arm points down. (Picture G). Pull tightly and wind the yarn once around the third arm. Repeat (ri PEET) with the fourth arm. (Picture H).

Turn the cross again. You should be back to the first arm. Keep winding and turning. Be sure to wind the yarn *next* to each strand, not over it.



When you have about 8 inches of yarn left, stop winding. Tuck the piece of yarn under the last woven (WOHV uhn) strand of yarn. Pull it tight. Tie a loop at the end of the yarn. (Picture I). Your god's eye is finished.

You can make a bigger god's eye if you wish. Just use longer sticks and more yarn.



EXAMPLE 6

Matching Directions

Here are some signs you might see every day. What directions do you think they are giving? Write the letter of the directions under each sign. The first is done.

1. D 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____

A. Do not ride bicycles here.
B. Turn right only.
C. Go right to find a public telephone.
D. Hold very carefully.
E. Walk across the street here.

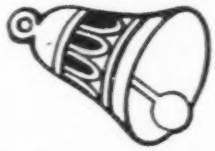
EXAMPLE 7

If your facilities allow for it, why not try making some simple recipes. Children's cookbooks are good sources with limited vocabulary. Also, try bringing in food containers that include instructions, like a box of Jello.

Here is a simple craft idea that I found in an old *Family Circle* magazine. This can be used for any time of the year, not just Christmas. The dough can be made into animals, characters from a story, or anything you want.

Dough-it-yourself holiday ornaments

For family holiday fun, here's an easy recipe to make old-fashioned tree ornaments at home that everyone will treasure.



2 cups all-purpose flour (not self rising)
1 cup salt
1 cup water
food color, optional

Combine flour and salt in a large flat-bottomed bowl. Mix well. Form into a ball by mixing in a little water at a time. If you want colored ornaments, add food color to the dough. Be sure to knead 7 to 10 minutes, until the dough has a smooth, firm consistency. Add a little more water if necessary.

Now you're ready to make a bell, a star, a Christmas tree or Santa. Just roll out the dough ½ -inch thick. Cut ornament shapes out of the dough using cookie cutters. make a small hole at the top of the ornament for thread to hang the finished product. Bake on a foil-covered cookie sheet at 325 degrees for about 30 minutes or until golden brown. Allow to cool. You can then paint the ornaments with water color, acrylic or enamel — and varnish or shellac for a lasting finish.

There are many craft books available that can be fun as well as educational. A good source is the *Dover Catalog*. They have available books on many hobbies, crafts, needlework, cooking and papercraft all at reasonable prices. They have many booklets for $1.00 and practically all their books are under $10.00

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